UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Vale District Office
Jordan Resource Area

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM REVIEW RECORD

EA Number OR-030-04-005 **Date Submitted for Comment** March 22, 2004 **Complete Review**
Proposed Action Construct a temporary fence in the Blue Mtn Pasture.
Proposed Name Blue Mountain Division Fence
Project Leader Cameron Rasor

DISCIPLINE/NAME		DATE REVIEWED	INITIALS	REVIEW COMMENTS
Range & Wild Horses	**Rasor**			
Vegetation	**Rasor**			
Botany & T&E Plants	**Findley**			
Wildlife & T&E Animals	**Sadowski**			
Fisheries	**Tait**			
Soil/Water/Air	**Wenderoth**			
Geology/Minerals	**Westfall**			
Cultural	**Sudman**			
Lands & Realty	**Manezes**			
Recreation/Wild & Scenic River	**Christensen**			
Wilderness	**Christensen**			
Fire Management				
Engineering & Force Acct.	**Pritchard**			
Noxious Weeds	**Silva**			
P&E Coordinator	**Sadowski**			Final Review & Filing
Project Leader	**Rasor**			Final EA & FONSI/Decision Record
Area Manager	**Taylor**			Final EA Review & FONSI/Decision

This page is to be filed with the
AD/CE/EA & FONSI/DECISION RECORD
Blue Mountain Division Fence
Environmental Assessment
EA # OR-030-04-005

BLM OFFICE:	Vale District, Jordan Resource Area
PROPOSED ACTION:	Temporary fence construction
LOCATION:	15 Mile Community Allotment/Blue Mountain Pasture
APPLICANT:	15 Mile Community Allotment Permittees

CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLAN

The proposed action is in conformance with the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan (SEORMP) and Record of Decision (ROD) of September 2002. In accordance with the SEORMP, the stocking rates and seasons of use for the 15 Mile Community Allotment will continue as specified in the Preferred Land Use Alternative of the January 1984 Southern Malheur Rangeland Program Summary (RPS), until the currently ongoing Standards and Guides assessment and evaluation is completed for the Trout Creek Geographic Management Area (GMA). The long term disposition of this proposed fence, or any future fence in the proposed location, will be subject to full review as part of the management evaluation done for the GMA.

The proposed temporary electric fence is in conformance with the SEORMP ROD and the following objectives:

Rangeland Vegetation
Objective 1: Restore, protect, and enhance the diversity and distribution of desirable vegetation communities including perennial native and desirable introduced plant species. Provide for their continued existence and normal function in nutrient, water, and energy cycles.

Rangeland/Grazing Use
Objective: Provide for a sustained level of livestock grazing consistent with other resource objectives and public land use allocations.

Special Status Plant Species
Objective: Manage public land to maintain, restore, or enhance populations and habitats of special status plant species.

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat
Objective 1: Manage upland habitats in forest, woodland and rangeland vegetation types so that the forage, water, cover, structure, and security necessary for wildlife are available on the public land.

Special Status Animal Species
Objective 1: Manage public land to maintain, restore, or enhance populations and habitats of special status animal species (Table 7, SEORMP).

Cultural Resources
Objective 1: Protect and conserve cultural and paleontological resources.

BACKGROUND

In 2003, the BLM initiated a contract to assess the health of the low elevation pastures in the Fifteen Mile Community Allotment and to work with the local ranchers and BLM in developing: 1) short term, interim management strategies which could be implemented immediately, consistent with the current grazing permit limitations, to afford rest or deferment to pastures in need; 2) long term recommendations relative to management, projects, etc. to be considered further as part of the Trout Creek GMA evaluation and subsequent NEPA analysis.

The Trout Creek Working Group and affected ranchers supported this approach as they recognized the need for an immediate plan of action to protect the health of the land, as well as that of the ranch operations involved. Their stated goal in encouraging BLM to act was and is "sustainable rangelands and sustainable ranches".

As stated in the contractor's report, he found some "untapped opportunities" within the allotment. The Blue Mountain Pasture contained such areas. The Blue Mountain Pasture is located in the Fifteen Mile Community Allotment of the Jordan Resource Area within the Vale District (See Figure 1). It is approximately 71,238 acres in size and ranges in elevation from 4,300 feet to 7,400 feet at the Blue Mountain summit. Topography varies from flat or slightly rolling hills to steep mountain sides and rimrock cliffs.

The contractor suggested constructing several projects within the Fifteen Mile Community Allotment, which are not the subject of this EA but will be considered in the future, through the Trout Creek GMA process. However, he felt the most important of these projects, which could help immediately, is a fence that would divide the Blue Mountain Pasture in two. This fence would separate two conflicting grazing operations, and create options for improving rangeland health within the pasture and potentially within the allotment. The permittees are willing to build the fence, and the project is endorsed by the Trout Creek Mountain Working Group.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION

The Blue Mountain Division Fence, which is proposed here as a temporary fence, would be constructed to facilitate: 1) orderly administration of grazing, by separating two conflicting grazing operations, and 2) potentially increase management options for improving rangeland health. The temporary fence and the pastures it creates would be monitored and analyzed again as part of the Trout Creek GMA evaluation process and associated NEPA analysis, before a final determination is made as to whether it should be made permanent.

1) Orderly Administration
Through the years, there have been disputes between the owner of 12 Mile Ranch and Oregon Canyon Ranch, along with the BLM, relative to areas of use and timing of use in the Blue Mountain Pasture. The location most discussed is around 12 Mile Summit.

The 12 Mile Ranch, grazes cattle in the Green Ponds Pasture, which is a riparian pasture containing Lahontan cutthroat trout, two consecutive years out of each four. This use is pursuant to a Biological Opinion with the USF&WS. The two years 12 Mile's cattle are not on the mountain, the majority of their time is spent grazing in the Blue Mountain Pasture, which provides approximately 60-80% of their forage from April 1 to October 31. During these years, the ranch depends on the forage in certain areas of the Blue Mountain Pasture. However, with no fences or natural barriers between 12 Mile Ranch and the Oregon Canyon Ranch, and given the fact that each operator grazes at a different time of year, the amount of forage one can depend on in a given year is uncertain because other the permittee's cattle could have already utilized the area that was planned on by the neighbor.

It is very difficult currently to defer grazing in certain areas of the Blue Mountain Pasture. The Oregon Canyon Ranch has grazed the south side of 12 Mile Summit the past two springs and this area is planned to receive deferment in 2004. However, with no fence to restrict the 12 Mile cattle, they can easily walk over the hill and graze it. Oregon Canyon Ranch is depending on this forage to be there in the fall.

Conversely, when Oregon Canyon Ranch cattle are grazing the south side of 12 Mile Summit, there is little to stop them from walking over to the north side and overgrazing an area that has already been grazed to allowable levels by 12 Mile cattle. These conflicts happen every year in one form or another within the pasture.

In order to provide orderly use and administration of the range, the Blue Mountain Division Fence is greatly needed. In addition, installing the temporary fence would make each permittee responsible for their management, and thus allow BLM to hold each independently accountable.

2) Increased Management Options
The proposed fence would increase livestock control, add a level of certainty to management that has not been present in the past, and provide opportunities to rest and/or defer grazing use in areas of Blue Mountain Pasture, which currently do not exist.

As described in number 1 above, providing rest or deferment around the 12 Mile Summit area is impossible without the Blue Mountain Division Fence. Blue Mountain Pasture is a large single pasture, but due to topographic features, it actually has several subunits or areas of use within the pasture. Livestock control within these areas of use currently relies upon physical features such as rock cliffs, steep ridges or distance from water. However, 12 Mile Summit does not contain natural features which exclude cattle from grazing one side or the other. The proposed fence would allow deferment in the 12 Mile Summit area.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Alternative I: Proposed Action

The proposed action is to construct approximately 5 miles of temporary electric fence (Figure 2) beginning on the Oregon Canyon Brush Control Fence in the SE¼SE¼, Section 35, T. 37 S., R. 40 E. From the originating point, the fence would go northeast to Jock Reservoir. Jock Reservoir would be fenced on four sides and gated to allow cattle access to water from either side of the Blue Mountain Division Fence. From Jock Reservoir, the fence would go north following Twelvemile Ridge to Twelvemile Summit. It would then continue north to the SE¼ SE¼, Section 24, T.37 S., R.40 E. and tie into a rimrock. The fence would then restart on the east side of the rimrock and go east to Blue Mountain Basin Reservoir Number 2. This reservoir would also be fenced on four sides and gated to allow cattle access to water from either side of the Blue Mountain Division Fence. From the Blue Mountain Basin Reservoir Number 2, the fence would continue east to the NE corner of Section 20, T. 37 S., R. 41 E. where it would tie into a rock rim.

The BLM would supply materials for the fence and the affected permittees would construct and maintain the fence to BLM specifications. The corners, braces and end panels of the temporary fence would be constructed with green Easy Panels (see Figure 3), which would lessen the visual impact of the fence. Green steel posts would be spaced at 18 feet intervals. The fence would be configured with a smooth bottom wire located 20 inches from the ground and a second smooth, electrified top strand located at 35 inches above the ground. The height, at 35" would not preclude wildlife from jumping over and the bottom wire would allow passage underneath. Each strand would be flagged with colored tape initially to make it obvious to animals in the area and reduce the potential for collisions with the fence. No mechanical clearing of vegetation or other soil disturbing methods would be allowed. However, the use of a chainsaw would be acceptable for removing brush in the immediate path of the fence to preclude shorting the electrified fence, in areas outside the WSA. No off-road vehicle travel would be allowed in the WSA and vehicle travel outside the WSA would be restricted to times when the soil is dry and firm enough to be driven on without creating ruts. Materials would be dispersed by hand or with the aid of pack animals within the WSA. Work inside the WSA would be done with out the benefit of mechanical equipment other than a chainsaw to clear brush in the immediate fence path.

The proposed temporary fence would remain in place until the completion of the Trout Creek GMA evaluation. Once the utility and impact of the fence has been considered thoroughly in relation to Trout Creek GMA grazing systems and other rangeland resources, a final determination would be made about whether to keep the fence permanently or remove the fence. Also, the fence portion within the WSA would be subject to removal if the WSA is subsequently designated Wilderness.

B. Alternative II: No Action

The temporary fence would not be constructed. Once the GMA evaluation process is completed, new grazing systems and rangeland projects would be analyzed. The Blue Mountain Division Fence would be a new project analyzed at that time.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

1. Vegetation

The dominant plant species on the landscape surrounding the proposed action is Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata wyomingensis*) and bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*). The majority of the affected area is in mid seral condition. However, field observations have shown portions of Blue Mountain Basin to be late seral. The livestock utilization standard for the Blue Mountain Pasture is 50% on key forage species. Utilization rates are moderate in most areas of the Blue Mountain Pasture. However, areas such as the Blue Mountain Basin are usually grazed at the low to moderate level because water is not consistently available for livestock.

2. Soils

The soils found in the project area were surveyed and described in Oregon's Long Range Requirements for Water 1969, Appendix I-11, Owyhee River Drainage Basin and Appendix I-12, Malheur Lake Drainage Basin. The project area consists of three soil mapping units from this fourth-order soil survey. The three units incorporate four classification units that occur in various percentages within each unit and have slope groups that range between 7-60+ percent.

Soils within the project area consist of shallow, well drained soils with surface textures from gravelly loam to very stony silty loam, subsurface textures from gravelly loams and heavy clay loams over cemented pans to very stony silt loams and silty clay loams. Typically, these soils occur on gently sloping to moderately steep old fans and high terrace remnants, gently undulating to rolling lava plateaus with some very steep faulted and dissected terrain on gently undulating to rolling lava plateaus, and some very steep faulted and dissected terrain (7-60+ percent slopes). The effect rooting depth on these soils is shallow (10-18 inches) and limited primarily by depth to cemented pans and parent material.

Unit 55-56/3-4 CU 55 soils, 7-12 percent slopes, 30 percent CU 56 soils, 12-20 percent slopes.
Unit 56/3-4 CU 56 soils, about 80 percent, 7-20 percent slopes.
Unit 75-76/5-6 CU 75 soils 20-35 percent slopes, 30 percent CU 76 soils, 35-60+ percent slopes.

Classification Unit 55

Soils are shallow, loamy, well drained with cemented pans on very extensive to moderately steep old fans and high terrace remnants. Soils occur usually at elevations of 3,000 to 5,500 feet and have a good potential for range seeding. Average annual precipitation ranges from 8-11 inches and mean annual air temperature centers around 47 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of brownish gray gravelly loam, to brown gravelly loam, to silica and lime cemented pan 6 to 20 inches thick over stratified loamy sand and gravel. Native vegetation consists of big sagebrush, low sagebrush, rabbitbrush, budsage, Atriplex spp., needlegrass, Sandberg bluegrass, and squirreltail grass.

Classification Unit 56

Soils are shallow, well drained with clayey subsoils and cemented pans on very extensive, gently sloping to moderately steep old fans and high terrace remnants. Soils occur usually at elevations of 3,000 to 5,500 feet and have potential for range seeding limited by hardpan and slope. Average annual precipitation ranges from 8-11 inches and mean annual air temperature centers

around 47 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of brownish gray gravelly loam, to light brown gravelly clay loam, to brown gravelly heavy clay loam, to silica cemented gravelly pan 6 to 20 inches thick over stratified loamy sand and gravel. Native vegetation consists of big sagebrush, low sagebrush, rabbitbrush, budsage, Atriplex spp., needlegrass, and squirreltail grass.

Classification Unit 75
Soils are shallow, loamy, very stony, and well drained soils over basalt, rhyolite, or welded tuff. They occur on gently undulating to rolling lava plateaus with some very steep faulted and dissected terrain. Soils occur at elevations from 4,000 to 6,000 feet and stones limit their potential for range seeding. Average annual precipitation is on the low side of the 8 to 11 inch range, and mean annual air temperature centers around 45 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consists of very stony silt loam, over stony loam, over stony silt loam, to bedrock at about 15 inches. Native vegetation consists mostly of bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg bluegrass, and big and low sagebrush.

Classification Unit 76
Soils are shallow, clayey, very stony, well drained soils over basalt, rhyolite, or welded tuff. They occur on gently undulating to rolling lava plateaus and some very steep faulted and dissected terrain. Soils occur at elevations from 3,500 to 6,500 feet and stones limit potential for range seeding. Average annual precipitation ranges from 8 to 11 inches, and mean annual air temperature centers around 47 degrees F. The soil profile by depth consist of gray very stony silt loam, brown stony silty clay, to brown stony and channery heavy silty clay loams over fractured bedrock at 18+ inches. Native vegetation consists of low sagebrush, Sandberg bluegrass, and bluebunch wheatgrass.

3. Water Resources
The project area is located along the watershed breaks between the Crooked Creek Basin, the Twelvemile Creek Basin, and the Oregon Canyon Creek Basin. There are no perennial flowing streams or springs along the proposed fence. All drainage channels and most reservoirs in the area surrounding the proposed fence are seasonal with most channels going dry by June. The major portion of the livestock water in the area is supplied by surrounding reservoirs and the permittees hauling water.

The project area lies within the 8-11 inch precipitation zone yet could receive a wide variation in precipitation from drought to wet years.

4. Air Quality
There are no air quality observation stations in the project area. However, it is believed that air quality is considered to be very good.

5. Noxious Weeds
Noxious weeds are not present in the immediate proposed area. Two noxious weeds, spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), a biennial or short-lived perennial and diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*), an annual or short-lived perennial, are known to exist within the Blue Mountain Pasture but these weeds are several miles from the proposed area. Spotted and diffuse

knapweed are Malheur County A-listed weeds and B-listed by Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). Spotted knapweed is also on ODA's "T" or Targeted noxious weed list, indicating it is an economic threat to the state and proposed to receive priority treatment action. Whitetop (*Cardaria draba*), a deep-rooted, long-lived perennial is also known to be within the Blue Mountain Pasture. Whitetop is "C" listed by both Malheur County and ODA. Both knapweeds are high priority weeds for BLM. Whitetop has limited distribution in that area which makes is it a high priority weed for the BLM.

6. Livestock

The Fifteen Mile Community Allotment, Management Category I (improve), has 5 permittees authorized to graze cattle within the allotment. However, only 3 permittees currently graze cattle in the Blue Mountain Pasture. Richard Yturriondobeitia's operation is highly dependent on the Blue Mountain Pasture. On average, his cattle harvest approximately 930 AUMs every year in the Blue Mountain Pasture. This is approximately 46% of his operation. However, the two years his cattle do not graze the Green Ponds Pastures, approximately 60-80% of the forage for his cattle are taken from the Blue Mountain Pasture. Mr. Yturriondobeitia usually utilizes Blue Mountain Pasture in the spring, summer and fall and greatly depends on this pasture the years he does not utilize Green Ponds. Alan White's average use in the Blue Mountain Pasture is approximately 1065 AUMs and his cattle utilize this pasture in the spring and fall. Mr. White does not have the problem that Mr. Yturriondobeitia has when he does not graze Green Ponds. While Green Ponds Pasture is being rested, Mr. White's cattle graze the V Pasture. Dave Etchart's average use is approximately 485 AUMs and his cattle predominately utilize Blue Mountain in the spring and fall. Blue Mountain is vital to Mr. Etchart in the spring for a turnout pasture.

Livestock control within Blue Mountain Pasture currently relies upon physical features such as rock cliffs, steep ridges or distance from water. Grazing pressure in the Blue Mountain Pasture, has historically been higher around Twelvemile Summit due to historic water hauling activities. Water has been hauled regularly to a ridge above Blue Mountain Basin. The remainder of livestock water is provided seasonally by reservoirs.

7. Wildlife

Wyoming big sagebrush habitats of Blue Mountain Basin provide very good quality forage and habitat structure for terrestrial wildlife including the following key species:

Game species: California bighorn sheep, mule deer, greater sage-grouse.
Non-game species: short-horned lizard, Brewer's sparrow, sage thrasher, and gray flycatcher.

Based on radio-collar tracking and other general observations (Walt VanDyke, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, pers. comm., November, 2003), California bighorn sheep occupy Blue Mountain and surrounding areas on a yearlong basis. The existing herd of about 100 bighorn has grown from an original transplant of 5 individuals that were released in 1988. Ewes tend to be sedentary and remain on Blue Mountain yearlong whereas rams tend to venture out into adjoining rangelands including Oregon Canyon, 12 Mile Ridge and probably other locations.

Where adequate water and cover are available, mule deer are resident on a yearlong basis. According to recent ODFW counts, about 100 mule deer winter in and around Blue Mountain.

Greater sage-grouse, a BLM Sensitive species, occupy Blue Mountain Pasture. One grouse strutting ground has been identified as a result of aerial survey work on upper elevation rangelands about six miles south of Blue Mountain. Given the location of this lek and the attributes of the sagebrush community present in Blue Mountain Basin, it is possible and probable that sage grouse nesting activity occurs within the proposed action area. BLM does not possess any specific survey information about current nesting locations in Blue Mountain Pasture. BLM must therefore assume that sage grouse nesting activity is probably taking place in Blue Mountain Basin on the basis of habitat relationships information in published literature. In other words, suitable nesting habitat is present and probably being used by the species until it is disproved on the basis of field data.

Based on existing scientific literature, sage grouse hens are known to travel up to twelve miles from leks in search of nesting sites (USDI BLM, 2000). Nesting typically occurs on landforms with flat or gently sloping topography and nest success is best where shrub canopy cover and herbaceous vegetation both provide desirable lateral and overhead cover (Connelley et al., 2000). The combined qualities of desirable landform and plant composition are both available in Blue Mountain Basin.

Winter sage grouse pellets were noted within Blue Mountain Basin during recent Standards and Guides (S&G's) assessment work and ODFW reports seeing them during aerial deer herd composition work.

Recent songbird/herptile surveys and general observations made over several years in the Trout Creek Geographic Management Area indicate that short-horned lizards, and landbirds including Brewer's sparrow, sage thrasher, and gray flycatcher are well represented within habitats similar to proposed action area.

8. Threatened or Endangered Plants and Animals

There are no federal or state Threatened or Endangered species of plants or animals known to be present within the proposed action area. Nor are there any species of plants or animals present currently identified as candidates for protective listing under ESA. Consequently, there will be no need to consult or conference with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding Section 7 of the ESA in response to the proposed action.

California bighorn sheep and greater sage-grouse, both BLM Sensitive species in Oregon, are known to be present within the proposed action area.

No special status plants are known to occur within the project area.

No further analysis regarding ESA will be provided in this EA because the proposed action would not have any effect on listed species.

9. Recreation and Visual Resources

Dispersed outdoor recreation in the proposed area consists primarily of hunting. Some dispersed sightseeing and day hiking may occur. Other recreation opportunities include backpacking, camping, photography, bird watching, and nature study. Visitation estimates are very few people per year (probably less than 400) because of rough vehicular access and distance from large population centers. Peak visitation undoubtedly occurs during autumn deer-hunting season.

VRM class for most of the project area is class IV, which allows for management activities that dominate the view and may become the focus of viewer attention. However, every effort would be made to minimize the impact of these projects by carefully locating activities, minimizing disturbance, and designing the projects to conform to the characteristic landscape. On the other hand, the far southwest end of the proposed fence would lie within the Twelvemile Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA), #OR-3-162. Within the WSA, VRM is class I, which allows only limited management activity, where the level of change should be very low and must not attract attention. Priority attention should be given to preserving the existing natural character of the landscape.

10. Cultural Resources

No cultural resource inventories have been performed within the sections involved in the current project. One prehistoric flake scatter was recorded within one mile of the proposed project.

There is also one historic site, the Ft. Harney to Ft. McDermitt wagon road, located within the project area. Ft. Harney and Ft. McDermitt were established in the 1860s. In order to move soldiers and supplies from one fort to another, the Ft. Harney to Ft. McDermitt road was built. The road was also known as the Harney Road (Nielsen 1987).

From Ft. Harney the road went south and east, following the Willamette Valley and Cascade Mountain Military (WVCMM) Road. The two roads separated east of Crane, Oregon where the Ft. Harney to Ft. McDermitt road turned south. It passed the east side of the Steens Mountain, then at Camp Alvord it turned west. The route then followed the Idaho Stage Co. line from Chico, California to Jordan Valley, Oregon past the Whitehorse Ranch. On the east side of the Oregon Canyon and Trout Creek Mountains, the road turned south, following the valley to Ft. McDermitt (Nielsen 1987). An older road to Ft. McDermitt followed the Denio to Jordan Valley Road for a distance northeast and east of the Whitehorse Ranch. The Ft. Harney to Ft. McDermitt road turned southeast once it reached the valley. About 9 miles north of McDermitt, the road joined up with the Ft. McDermitt to Jordan Valley Road, also known as the Winnemucca to Silver City road (Nielsen 1987). The road passed the Alvord Ranch, one of the most famous ranches in the west due to a colorful past and spectacular scenery. A military camp, Camp Alvord, was established at the ranch in June of 1864. It was named for Brigadier-General Benjamin Alvord who commanded the Dept of Oregon from 1861 to 1865. The camp was abandoned in September of 1864, when another camp was established at the Whitehorse Ranch. That camp was named C.F. Smith. The military continued to use Camp Alvord sporadically over the next 10 years (Nielsen 1987).

Most supplies for these ranches were obtained from Winnemucca, 165 miles south, so the Ft. Harney to Ft. McDermitt road aided transportation for ranches as well as for military uses (Nielsen 1987).

There were two other roads between the Whitehorse Ranch and Ft. McDermitt. The Ft. Harney to Ft. McDermitt Road is named on the GLO plats. Which of the roads was most heavily used is unknown (Nielsen 1987).

For the most part, wagon roads and military routes simply followed previously established and well-used Indian trails (Hanley 1988).

11. Wilderness Study Area

Approximately 2,200 feet of the far southwestern end of the fence would be located within the Twelvemile Creek WSA. Naturalness values in this WSA are high, but opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined types of recreation are somewhat degraded in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project due to the east-facing slope. The eastern boundary of the wilderness study area is a large powerline that runs north and south. There are also several livestock reservoirs, fences, roads, and crested wheatgrass seedings all in view from the east-facing slope. This has the effect of exposing visitors to nearby sights and sounds of intensive ranching activities and range improvements in the valley below.

The Final Oregon Wilderness EIS (December 1999) identifies the impacted portion of this WSA as land recommended non-suitable for wilderness, while land to the west of the steep, east-facing escarpment is recommended suitable. The impacted portion lies within a "zone of influence" (regarding an evaluation of naturalness quality) created by nearby reservoirs, fences, powerlines, seedings, etc.

12. Other Mandatory Elements

The following mandatory elements are either not present or would not be affected by the proposed action or alternatives:

Critical Elements	Affected	
	Yes	No
Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns		X
Prime and Unique Farmlands		X
Floodplains		X
Native American Religious Concerns		X
Hazardous and Solid Wastes		X
Wild and Scenic Rivers		X
Wetlands and Riparian Zones		X
Environmental Justice		X
Adverse Energy Impacts		X

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Alternative I: Proposed Action

1. Vegetation

There are no known T&E plants or plants of special management concern in the area. Nevertheless, an inventory of the fence route would be conducted prior to construction and any plants of concern encountered would be avoided through realignment of the fence route.

There are several direct effects to vegetation from the construction and existence of the proposed fence as well as some indirect effects. If the proposed fence is constructed, the existing vegetation directly adjacent to the fence would be driven on by vehicles hauling materials. Most of the shrubs, grasses and forbs would not be permanently damaged due to the vehicle traffic. However, some individual plants may perish. Some evidence of vehicle tracks along the fence line could persist. However, if vehicles no longer drive the fence line following construction, vegetation would eventually fill in the vehicle tracks. No long term impacts to vegetation are expected from the construction of the temporary fence. Since no off-road vehicle travel would be allowed in the WSA, no vehicle impacts would occur.

There would also be the possibility of impacts resulting from livestock walking along the fence and trampling vegetation. However, these impacts would not be substantial and if the fence were removed they would be unnoticeable within a few years.

Grazing pressure and utilization rates on the majority of the land surrounding the proposed fence would remain similar to the current situation, on average. Blue Mountain Pasture is a large single pasture, but due to topographic features, it actually has several subunits or areas of use within the pasture. The proposed fence would create three areas of use, which would provide separation of permittee's cattle. This would make each permittee more accountable for their own management and provide for orderly administration of the range resource, by reducing conflicts and overlapping grazing impacts. Cattle management would become easier and opportunities to periodically defer or rest areas of use within the pasture would be increased. With portions of the Blue Mountain Pasture receiving treatments of deferment and rest, vegetation within the Blue Mountain Pasture should remain stable and could improve in local areas of use if deferment or rest from grazing during the critical growing season is achieved on a regular basis.

2. Soils

Adverse effects to soil resources from the proposed project would be short-term surface disturbances from fence construction and long-term localized soil compaction from any livestock trailing along the fence.

3. Water Resources

There are no perennial or intermittent flowing streams near the proposed project. All drainages in and near the proposed fence line are ephemeral, do not support riparian vegetation, and are located in the upper most headwaters of the three basins. Any localized interception of overland runoff by trails along the fence would be minimal because of the fence location. Therefore, adverse effects to riparian and water resources would not occur.

4. Air Quality

The proposed project would not impact the air quality and it would remain very good.

5. Noxious Weeds

Since there are no known noxious weeds in the immediate area and there would be no scraping of vegetation through mechanical means, noxious weeds would not increase in the area due to construction of the fence.

6. Livestock

Allotment livestock rotations and numbers would remain similar to current systems. Livestock control and orderly administration of the range resource within the Blue Mountain Pasture (as referenced above in Vegetation) would be much improved. Oregon Canyon Ranch's cattle would no longer be able to travel north, and 12 Mile Ranch's cattle would no longer be able to travel south across 12 Mile Ridge. This would eliminate mixing of cattle from the two operations, hold each permittee's cattle in their own area of use, allow each permittee to be accountable for their own management, provide for orderly administration of the range resource, and provide opportunities for deferment or rest of areas within the Blue Mountain Pasture.

Permittees would also have greater flexibility and the ability to operate without the worry of their cattle mixing with other permittee's cattle. This would allow them flexibility to breed with different bulls, calve at different times of the year, and graze heifers with special low weight birthing bulls. Branding would also be easier because cattle would not mix.

7. Wildlife

Direct harassment impacts to key terrestrial wildlife during fence construction would be avoided because construction would occur after severe winter weather when mule deer are potentially present and before the onset of most landbird nesting activity (May-June). Even if the fencing project extended into the May June nesting period, the harassment impact would be temporary and brief. The electric fence proposed would be relatively easy to construct and would be constructed quickly. It would be reasonable to expect over a mile constructed per day, so time spent in any one area would be brief. Game and non-game species habitat security important to survival and production would therefore be

protected. The anticipated impacts would be consistent with those that have already been analyzed in the SEORMP FEIS.

Fencing specifications would be expected to diminish the chances for mule deer and bighorn sheep entanglement resulting in injury and/or death. Adverse impacts to big game movements east of Blue Mountain, in response to severe winter weather conditions or in the course of traditional travel, would generally be avoided because the proposed fence is located parallel to typical up-slope/down-slope movements. The anticipated impacts to big game would be consistent with those that have already been analyzed in the SEORMP FEIS.

New fencing would increase the risk of sage grouse collisions with the fence, at least initially; and it would increase the risk of raptor predation on sage grouse (especially from fence braces, end panels and gate assemblies, which are used by raptors as hunting perches). However, given that the proposed action is not located in close proximity to a lek or near a wet meadow complex, which are visited often by grouse, mortality losses should not be significant. The proposed fence would therefore conform to conservation measures identified in the Oregon/Washington Interim Policy for management of sage grouse habitat because it is located more than six tenths of a mile from the nearest lek (USDI BLM, 2000, page 12).

8. Recreation and Visual Resources

This fence would not unduly restrict access to recreation use areas. Though, the impacted area is "open" to cross-country off-highway vehicle travel (see SEORMP map for OHV designations), it is infrequently used. Any OHV users would be limited somewhat in their travel. They might have to travel off of preferred routes in order to access gate openings while moving from southeast of the fence to the northwest. This would also hold true for horseback recreationists.

Visual impacts would be slight when the fence is viewed from a distance, but would gradually draw viewers' attention as they approached closer to the fence. Additional visual contrast may result if livestock create a well-worn path parallel to the fence, or if grazing utilization is substantially higher on one side of the fence than the other. Nevertheless, the dominate VRM class is IV and all expected impacts are consistent with VRP class IV.

9. Cultural Resources

This fence would not adversely affect the Ft. Harney to Ft. McDermitt wagon road. This section of the wagon road is used as a two-track by area ranchers, so the intrusion of a fence across it would not detract significantly from its current integrity. There would be a gate in the fence where it crosses the wagon road, so that tourists who might be interested in exploring the old wagon route would not be hindered by the fence. Any other cultural resources found during preconstruction inventory of the project would be avoided during construction.

10. Wilderness Study Area

At the southwest end of the fence, 2200 feet of fence would create a slight visual intrusion upon wilderness characteristics. The net effect would be moderated by the pre-existing visual impacts from the powerline, fence and other nearby range improvements and man-made structures. Impacts could also be reduced by careful selection of fencing materials (e.g., easy panel ends, solid green metal posts, etc.) and by prudent and reasonable restrictions on installation methods (e.g., no off-road motorized travel within the WSA, no remnant chainsaw cuts on stumps after brush removal, etc.). Greater visual contrast could actually result from livestock trailing along the fence-line itself. The extent and intensity of this impact would be dependent on nearby water sources, historic trailing patterns, etc. In this specific location, there appears to be little cause for livestock to create noticeable trails immediately adjacent to the proposed fence route. Noise and visual intrusions during actual construction of the fence would create some very short-term impacts to visitors seeking wilderness experiences.

Due to the temporary nature of fences and negligible effects on the Twelvemile WSA's suitability for wilderness designation, the proposed fencing project would be capable of meeting non-impairment standards for WSAs, under BLM's Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review (IMP).

B. Alternative II: No Action

Under this alternative, the temporary fence would not be constructed and the proposed action would be further analyzed in the Trout Creek GMA Evaluation.

1. Vegetation

The effects on vegetation would be unchanged as compared to the current situation. Forage would continue to be lightly or moderately used around the proposed fence location. Under this alternative, impacts associated with fence construction would not occur. Opportunities for local improvement through deferment or rest would be forgone.

2. Soils

Adverse effects to soil resources would not occur.

3. Water Resources

Adverse effects to water resources would not occur.

4. Air Quality

Air quality would remain the same.

5. Noxious Weeds

Noxious weeds would continue to exist in their current locations.

6. Livestock

Livestock grazing and rotations in the Blue Mountain Pasture and around the proposed fence location would remain similar to the current situation. Opportunities for improved grazing administration and accountability would be forgone. Increased management opportunities would be foregone.

7. Wildlife

No changes in habitat security or vegetative habitat quality important to key species of wildlife would occur. Potential for some additional fence collisions resulting in big game and greater sage-grouse mortalities would be avoided.

8. Recreation and Visual Resources

Impacts to dispersed recreation activities would remain the same as it is now.

9. Cultural Resources

There would be no impacts to cultural resources.

10. Wilderness Study Area

Impacts to the Twelvemile Creek WSA would remain unchanged from the current situation.

MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL IMPACTS

The BLM Botanist will conduct a field search prior to construction of the fence to ensure that actions authorized by the BLM would not contribute to the need for federal listing of a special status plant. The Resource Area Archeologist will conduct a field search and Class III cultural resource inventory prior to construction to determine if cultural resources exist along the proposed fence route. If either the Botanist or the Archeologist finds any special status plants or artifacts, the fence route will be modified to avoid any potential adverse impacts.

Fence posts will be solid green and fence panels, corners, and gate assemblies will be constructed with green "Easy Panels". No off-road motorized travel within the WSA would be allowed. All fence materials must be transported by hand or horse in the WSA. If sagebrush is cut with a chainsaw it must be done close to the ground.

The general location of the fence would be similar to the proposed; however, the placement may be adjusted to meet resource management objectives. In order to protect habitat security of wintering animals during severe winter weather, construction will not occur between December 1 and February 28th.

No off-road travel will be allowed except when soils are dry and firm enough to avoid creating ruts.

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